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THE RURAL SCHOOL AS A COMMUNITY CENTRE
- A discussion dealing with the Problem of
the Assimilation of New Canadians in
Western Canada -

by

J.W. McALLISTER, B.S.A.

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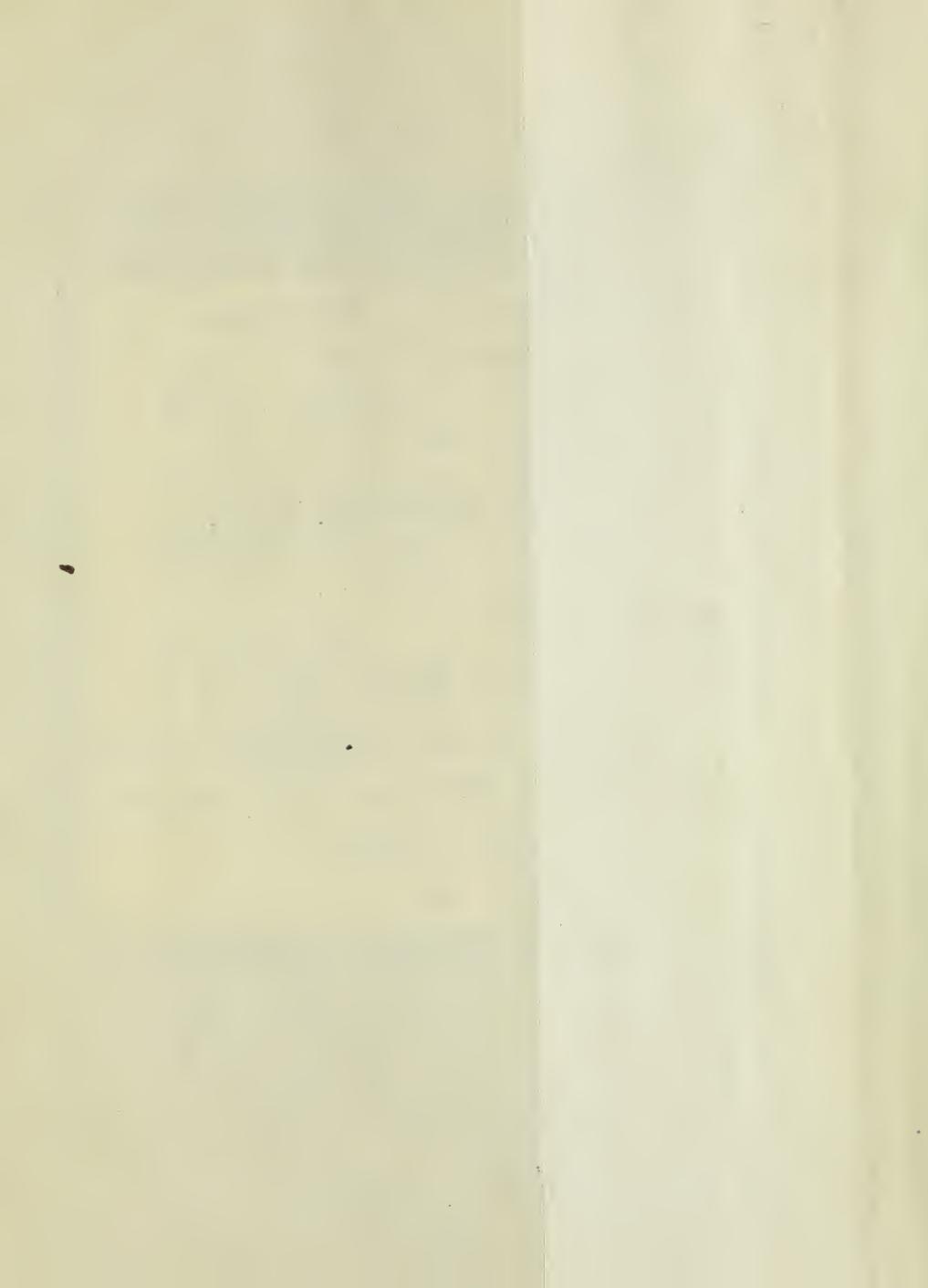
A THESIS

Submitted to the University of Alberta
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree
of

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN AGRICULTURE

Edmonton, Alberta

1925

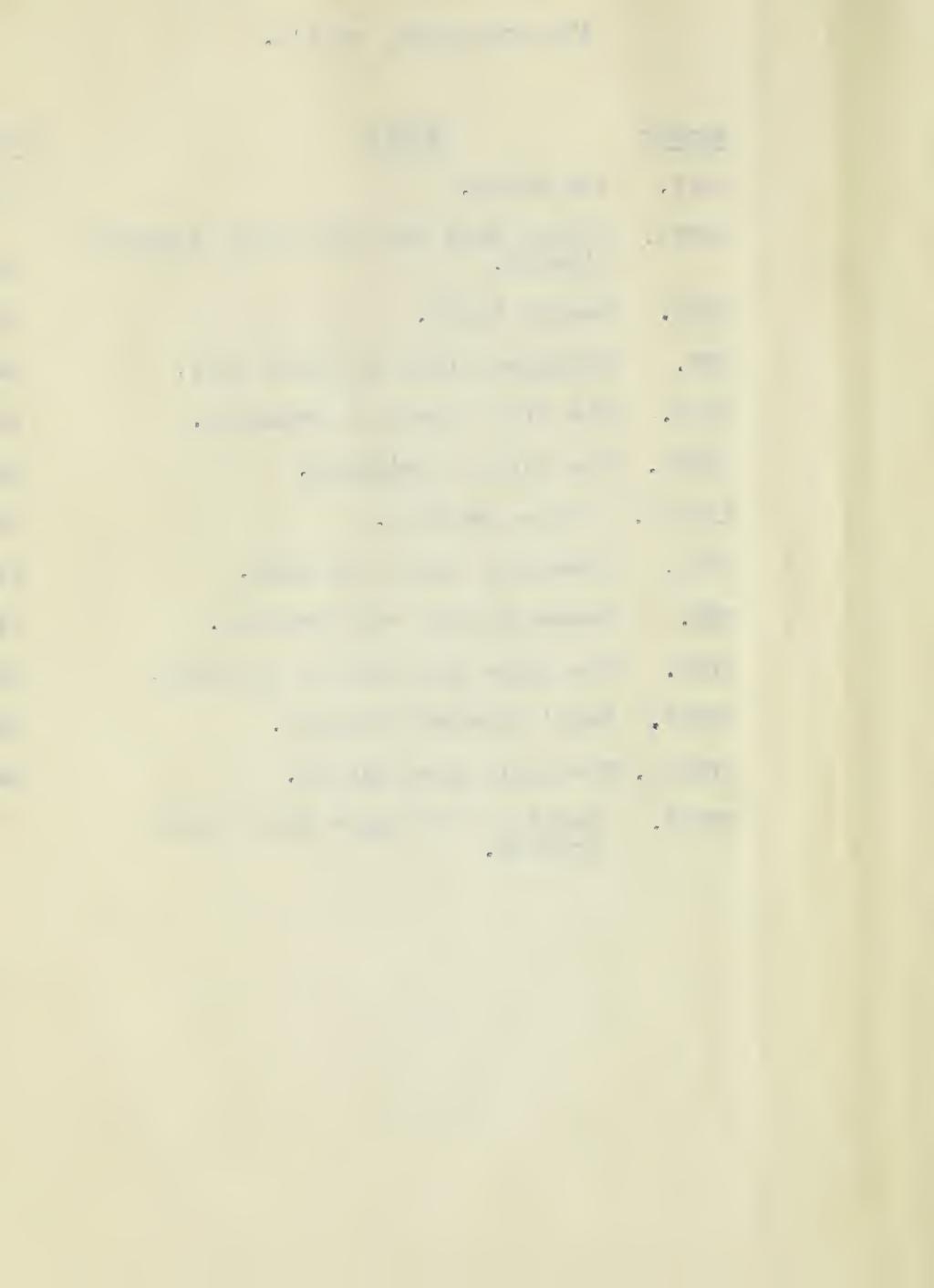


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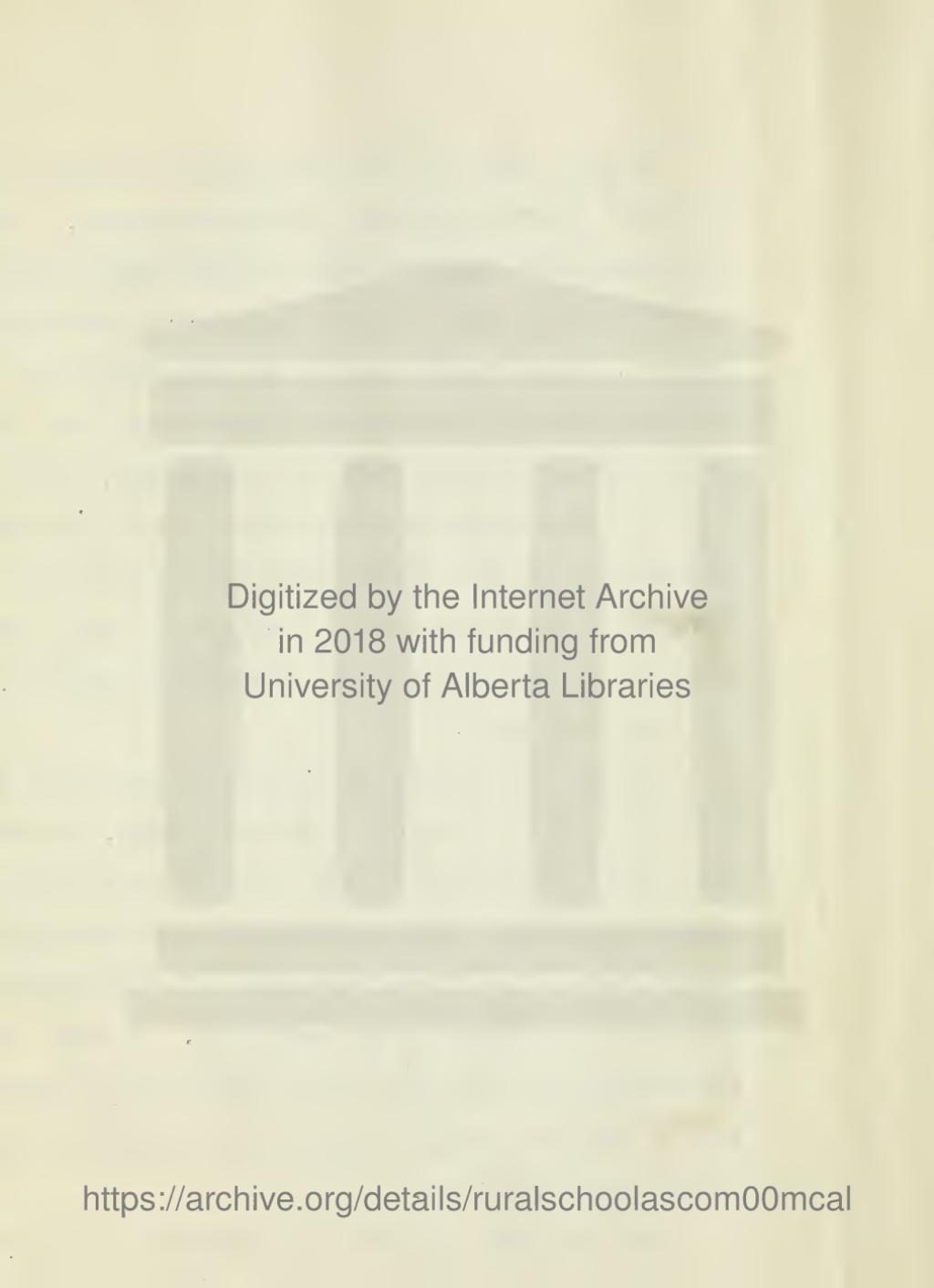
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A great deal of literature has been written on our rural school problems in Western Canada. The advantages and disadvantages of both consolidated and one-room rural schools have been freely discussed. However, in my humble opinion no one has really attempted to show how large a place a one-room rural school can be made to fill in a community. Our rural schools offer tremendous opportunities to the ambitious, progressive and far-seeing teacher who goes into a district to make the school function in giving the greatest service to not only the school children, but the adults as well.

It is not my purpose to deal at any great length with the actual teaching in the classroom. At the same time, I propose in this essay to treat a perfectly specific problem. This problem is the successful assimilation of our New Canadians into the present generation of Alberta boys and girls. It also includes the methods by which the rural school can be made to fill a very efficient as well as an attractive part of any community life.

To show what may be accomplished with a school of this type, I will describe my own experiences as a

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teacher in the Angle Lake school, thirty miles north of the C.N.R. town of Vermilion. I spent seven years in this district.

Rolling parkland, with a few large hills and some heavy poplar and birch timber, numerous small lakes and streams, a rich clay loam soil with a few very sandy sections, these were the outstanding features of this pioneer country. Very few of the settlers had been there more than five years, and the school had only been built two years before my arrival.



I. RUTHENIAN GIRLS.

Many nationalities were represented in the district. Americans, Canadians, Swedish, German-French,

English, Scotch, and Irish formed approximately half of the settlement. The other half consisted of Ruthenians, as the school district was situated on the line of demarcation between the English-speaking settlement to the east and the large Ruthenian settlement on the west. The problem of handling the school successfully then included as well very careful treatment of international, political and religious questions in order to bind this cosmopolitan settlement into one co-operative unit. For the first few years many of the Ruthenian parents and a few of the English-speaking parents refused to take any active interest in the school or its activities. They were suspicious of each other and of any stranger in the community, and for that reason thought it better to stay away. Time and the splendid example of others corrected this attitude.

Within an hour of my arrival at Angle Lake, the Secretary, G.J. Algot, and I walked over to see the school and grounds. A straggling two-wire, gateless fence surrounded two acres of blackened stumps, a small poplar grove at the back and the school. The school board had shown its wisdom in erecting a well-built frame school measuring thirty-four feet long by twenty-four feet wide, with a full concrete basement. The

woodpile showed up prominently behind the school, as also did the two closets a little farther back. Not a tree or flower-bed of any kind had been planted and a roughly plowed fire-guard rendered almost useless the only clear playground space in the two acres. The well with its poplar curbing, and rope and pulley occupied the north-east corner of the grounds. No playground equipment was to be seen and apparently "tag" and "pump-pump-pull-away" among the stumps had been the standbys in school athletics.

However, there was a well-planned, modern, clean school to start with. The walls were bare inside except for three maps and a John Deere calendar. A large box-stove, connected to the chimney by a long black stove-pipe, held a central position among the seats. There were three windows on the east and west sides and two windows and a door in the north end. A cloak-room had been partitioned off at the north end. There was no shelf for either water pail or lunch pails, so they were placed on the floor. The library consisted of a dozen books in a Sunlight Soap box, and the windows were innocent of either blinds or curtains.

To offset these more or less minor handicaps,

I had a congenial secretary with whom at first sight I knew co-operation was certain. He had children of his own and so had the other members of the board. Therefore they took a real live interest in the progress of the school, and if dealt with squarely and sensibly, they would without a doubt function to the limit of their financial ability. At this point it is well to bear in mind that this was a very young school district with much unoccupied land and a new school to pay for. An inexperienced teacher would very likely have ruined all chance of success by immediately ordering a long list of materials wanted for the school, then becoming angry or discouraged because it was not supplied in full at once and resigning to leave for pastures new. A little bit at a time, providing that it is fairly continuous, is much better than the long lists that tend to clog the stream of co-operation between the secretary and the teacher. Care must be taken that none but essential and useful articles are ordered on these first lists.

Twelve children reported when school opened, and we set to work immediately to improve both school and grounds. This work was done before and after school and during recesses and noon-hours. When the children

understood that we were to construct some playground equipment, no other incentive was necessary to get them to work. We levelled parts of the fire guard and played such games as Blind Man's Buff and Drop the Handkerchief. Two trees in the school grove were used for our first swing. A merry-go-round was built in the same grove by using a stump already in the correct position and a fourteen foot plank donated by the secretary. These simple pieces of apparatus proved a great boon to the children, especially the Ruthenians. Many of them had to work very hard at home, and none of them knew how to play games. Even a rope for a swing or a slab for a merry-go-round had been beyond their reach. As soon as these were in operation at the school, the Ruthenian children rose earlier, did their chores and were on their way to school at half-past six or seven o'clock in order to have plenty of swinging before school time.

We made our plans for a small flower garden and tree plantation the first spring, and the board had a new page wire fence constructed to protect our work. A passenger gate and a traffic gate opened directly north of the school onto the east and west road, and



II. The Merry-go-round.

a stile over the east fence connected with the north and south road. From that time on range stock could be effectively kept off the school grounds, and our trees and flower beds were safe. This also added greatly to the cleanliness of the school yard. Our gardening for the first year consisted in building two rustic willow arches immediately in front of the school porch, and planting near these two balm of gilead trees and two spruce trees. A few hardy shrubs and perennial flowers were planted in the flower beds, and wild cucumbers and hops were trained over the arches. To one side of this setting, the flag pole

was erected and the flag flew every day that the school was in operation for seven years. This example was emulated by other school districts, and the foreign-born were given ample opportunity to know our flag. The death of any outstanding Canadian as Lord Strathcona, Father Lacombe, or Sir Wilfrid Laurier, was observed by lowering the flag to half-mast and telling the story of these men's lives.



III. First Rustic Arches and Trees.

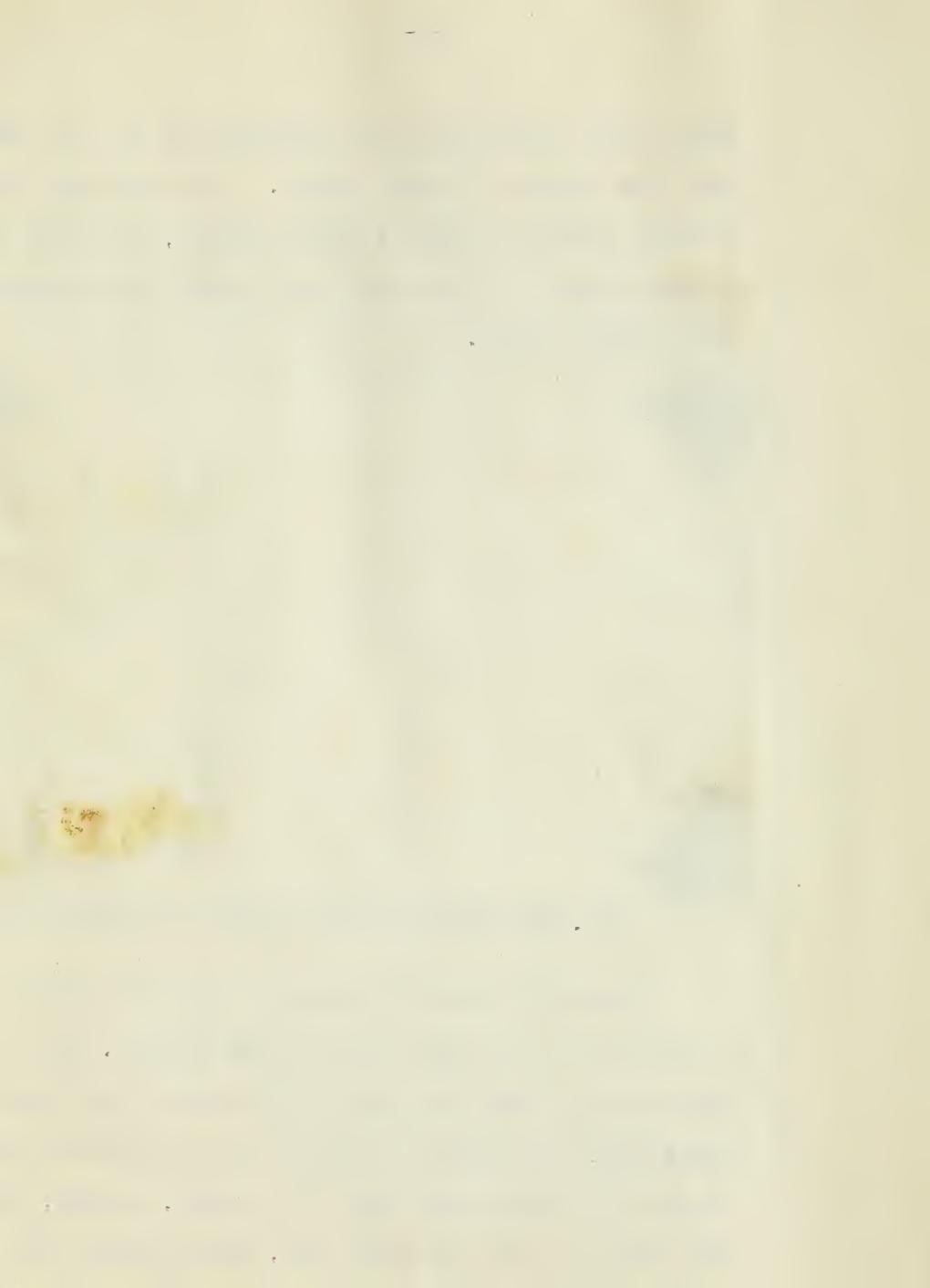
The well needed cleaning out badly, so we organized into groups, and with rope and pulley pulled the water out of the well. That night the trustees

met at the school well and cleaned out all the sediment and trash of former years. In a few days we had a fresh supply of good drinking water, and this saved a great deal of time previously spent in carrying water half a mile.



IV. The Schoolgrounds during the first year.

The earth from the basement had been left in a big pile at the west side of the school. We organized a "bee" as soon as the spring work was completed, and enlisted fathers and bachelors alike. In one day we cleared away the stumps, plowed, disced and levelled all the open land, hauled away the basement earth and cleaned all the rubbish out of our



poplar grove. Grass was later grown on the plowed land and by mowing it twice a year the grounds were always kept neat in appearance.



V. The Noon Lunch Hour.

The poplar grove had now become a pleasant little park where the children could rest on hot days or eat their lunches during the summer months. The pupils were held responsible for all waste paper and scraps from dinner pails that were left in the grove. By starting them off in a clean grove they were encouraged to try to keep it tidy. The older pupils always took the young beginners in hand each year, and by both

example and precept they taught them the first principles of Canadian citizenship.

During the second summer we added still further to our equipment. Posts were peeled, marked off in feet and inches and set up where the boys could test their jumping ability. We held competitions every Friday afternoon from three to four o'clock, and both boys and girls took part in all the standard jumps. Records were taken and kept posted in the school, and week by week you would find these young athletes coming back determined to do their best. Definite measurements and records settled a lot of useless arguments and encouraged honesty.

To give more playground space, the two closets were moved from their all too prominent position just behind the school, to the back part of the grove. They were placed ten rods apart with a natural growth of willow and poplar between them. Winding paths led through the grove to the closets. Thus they were still within convenient distance but hidden from view from the playground.

During all this time we had gradually been adding to our stock of school equipment such useful articles as soap, wash basin, towels, water-pail, a shelf for

dinner pails and tea and coffee bottles, blinds for the windows, a school clock, a bookcase, some new library books, and some much needed maps. A few selected pictures bought through the Camrose Normal School gave our walls a more home-like appearance.

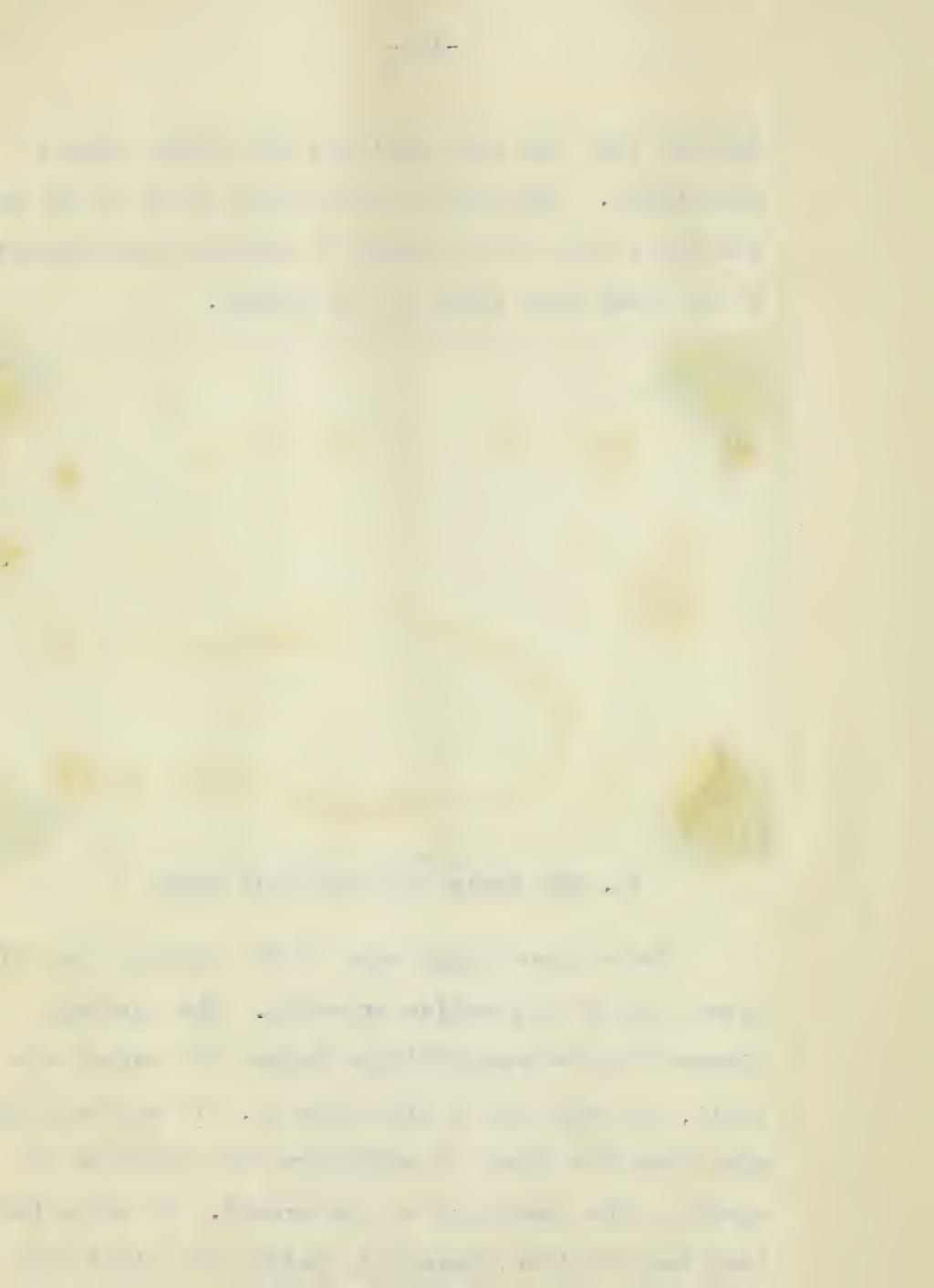
Visitors were encouraged to come to the school for the last hour on Friday afternoons. This period was always set aside for games or for impromptu programs in the school or grove. Each pupil was encouraged to build up a *répertoire* from which a selection could be made when called upon. The parents were not only pleased to see their children taking part but also to see that the taxpayers' money was being spent wisely. The fact that visitors were welcome soon disarmed even the most suspicious parents and they began to find an excuse to visit the school. The Friday programs paved the way to greater entertainments in the fall and at Christmas time. Much of the first nervousness had gone and the pupils along with some of the adults of the district took part in fairly difficult plays and choruses with considerable credit to themselves and to the delight of their parents. One little Ruthenian lad of eight years gave his parents the surprise of their lives when he recited in very good

English that old poem entitled "The Night before Christmas". For this reason every child in the school did his or her bit in order to link up the interests of the home with those of the school.



VI. The Angle Lake Baseball Team.

The men and older boys of the district met three times a week to practise baseball. The baseball diamond had been established before the school was built, and was half a mile from it. It had been my plan from the first to centralize all branches of sport in the community at the school. It would have been very foolish, especially during the first year or two, to attempt to start a diamond near the school as



public sentiment was pretty well bound up in the original site. However, we benefitted by having all slightly ripped baseballs and gloves, and cracked bats handed on to the school team. The boys and girls learned to repair these things and also learned the value of a stitch in time. We laid out our school diamond on the east side of the school in such a way that it did not interfere with the football goals already in place. No changes were necessary then when we gave up baseball in the fall and began to play football.

We had a sort of unwritten law that there was to be no loafing around the school grounds during play-time unless for a very good reason. From the very first I set out to eradicate two most undesirable types from our little democracy. One was the "Bully" and the other was the "Quitter". If there is any choice between these two I would prefer the "Bully". The other type is present and well known in any school. He, or she, will only play any game as long as they are doing the part they like best, as for instance, batting or pitching baseball. But the moment they are put out, no matter how fairly, then they throw up the game and quit, and try to get into some other game where the same thing will occur again.

My cure for these two individuals was to deprive them of the privilege of playing any games for a stated period, and instead they were put at such muscle-making tasks as piling wood, chopping out stumps, carrying stones and water, hoeing and weeding the garden. A few such examples at the very first had the desired effect.

At first both boys and girls had to play such games as baseball, football, and basketball, together in order to have two full teams. The smaller children enjoyed themselves on the swing, the jumping standard, or in riding the merry-go-round. Therefore everyone on the grounds was in action, and as far as expedient, at whatever presented the greatest appeal. I made it my special duty to be out at recesses and noon hours and personally referee, umpire, or supervise all playground activities. This is essential if the smaller, weaker pupils are to get fair play, and if the selfishness of some of the others is to be stamped out. Some teachers will claim that it takes all their recesses and noon hours in putting work on the board and preparing new lessons. There may be a few cases where there is not sufficient blackboard space provided, but in most schools the work can be so

organized that the board-work can be put on either in the morning before nine or after four o'clock. If we are to have Canadian citizens, who know how to play fairly and honestly, then it is the teacher's duty to be out with the pupils and supervise their activities while they are directly responsible for them.

When the weather proved unfavorable for outdoor games, the basement and the main schoolroom provided plenty of space. We had the seats fastened to wooden strips so that they could be quickly moved to one side of the school. Then games such as straddle-ball, over-head ball, and dodge-ball were all possible indoor sports. Boxing, first-aid exercises, stunts, and even the old-fashioned spelling match, served very useful purposes at such events.

I was very fortunate in choosing as my life-mate a young woman who took an active part in such games as basketball, tennis and hockey. This combination proved an added advantage in a pioneer district like this. While I was busy playing the games with the men or helping them organize their committees, Mrs. McAllister was carrying on similar work for the married women and older girls of the

community. At first they laid out a basketball court near the baseball diamond, as we had not yet got the school grounds in shape for this game. They held their own entertainment and dance, and realized enough money to buy a good basketball and bloomers and middies for the team. Later when a basketball court was established at the school the ball and uniforms became community property with the school as the centre. Other districts formed ladies' basketball teams, and a league series added greatly to the interest of the game.



VII. Angle Lake Basketball Team.



Even the men took an active interest in basketball. For the first two or three nights they were content to look on and applaud the efforts, effective or otherwise, of their fair friends. Then one night after the girls had quit playing, the men organized a game among themselves. I shall never forget that struggle. Basketball rules were cast to the four winds; the playing ground was enlarged to two or more acres; Marquis of Queensbury rules, half-nelsons, strangle-holds, high and low tackles, all went for legitimate practices until the gang was exhausted. Then while the dust was settling, casualties were being given first aid and the men were recovering their breath, we went over the rules governing basketball, and from then on they began to play the game in real earnest. The smiles on their faces gave sufficient indication that they had forgotten the hard work and worries of the day and were out to enjoy themselves thoroughly. The fact that the men's baseball team and the ladies' basketball team were winning seventy-five per cent of their games was a source of great inspiration to the boys and girls who were playing these games at school. The time finally came when

both men and women met at the school two or three times a week for an evening's baseball or basketball. All this had taken four years, by which time we finally saw the first of our centralization scheme taking definite shape. But we had let it follow its natural course, guiding only where it was necessary to be sure of the desired result. As far as possible we kept out of the limelight and instead trained natural leaders of the district to take charge while we were left free to get behind the scene and promote our community plans more effectively.

There were many opportunities offered to go on fishing trips, to picnics or for long drives across country. I well remember three days spent at Stoney Lake where twelve of the young men and women of the district had gone to fish. We had taken the necessary food and camping outfit for the trip. It started to rain shortly after we reached the lake. We had to abandon our tents and take shelter in a sod-roofed log shack. The rain continued to come down in torrents accompanied by a 40-mile wind. In twenty-four hours the north half of the roof was leaking like a sieve and most of the mud plaster was washed out of the

chinks between the logs. Another like period elapsed and the other half of the roof began to leak, so we put our tent up inside the house. The wind would have torn it to ribbons had we put it up outside.

In spite of all these handicaps we thoroughly enjoyed the experience. The lake was far too rough to think of risking a row-boat on it, so fishing was done from the shore, and three fish only were caught. Through the open windows of the house we practised with our rifles on rocks, fence posts or other suitable targets. A bedraggled but happy crew made its way home through a sea of mud and streams that had become veritable torrents.



VIII. The Covered Wagon on the Elk Point Ferry.



You may consider the story of this fishing trip as having little to do with the subject in hand, but here is the point. By going out with these people and enduring common temporary privations like this, friendships were strengthened and new bonds of sympathy sprang up that later proved invaluable in developing community life. Many other trips followed, most of them without involving any discomfort whatever, but all serving a set purpose; to gather up all the loose strands of their community activities and bind them into one complete whole.

To widen the influence of our community work we organized a series of inter-school games. There were four schools within convenient distance. The games were played on either Friday or Saturday afternoons. Basketball and baseball were introduced by this means into schools where they had not been played before. Then the parents and the big brothers and sisters began to attend the games, to "root" for their own team and to meet visitors from other districts. A real intense rivalry sprang up and served to stir the players to put forth their very best to win.

There was another advantage in having these school districts brought together, which must not be overlooked. Members of the school boards, the parents and even the children themselves were given an opportunity to quietly compare the playground apparatus, the condition of the school buildings and grounds, and the teacher's equipment, with that of their own school. This had a very wholesome effect on certain of the school boards and also on some of the teachers who had been none too active. The Angle Lake pupils always came back to their school feeling justly proud of it and fully realizing the importance of constant co-operation to keep everything at its best. They began to look upon it as a real game in life to which all the principles of team-work in any other game could be applied.

The question of transportation for these inter-school games must be arranged well in advance. The teacher must study the busy times in the country and arrange transportation needs accordingly. During the height of spring work, haying and harvest, the opportunities to get a team and a wagon or buggy are very limited. There are two periods on the farm when it is fairly easy to secure an outfit. The first

period comes between spring work and haying, and the second comes after harvest. As time goes on and motor cars increase in numbers, the difficulty of transporting your school-teams will become less of a problem.



IX. Transportation

The people of these districts began to look upon our school games and outings as a sort of nucleus for community picnics. We organized a school picnic to drive to Deadman Creek where it empties into the North Saskatchewan. A family of beavers was the drawing card in this case. Later the secretary transported a group of eighteen pupils and parents in his new

International motor truck to the Buffalo Park at Wainwright, where they had the supreme satisfaction of eating their lunch with the buffalo and elk almost surrounding them. Berry-picking trips followed and in every case I found these excursions very helpful in such subjects as geography, history, English, and nature study in the pupils' school work. Oral composition became an easy matter for pupils who had made these trips because they had actually seen the thing they were talking about.

During the summer months the secretary used to leave his organ at the school, as my wife and I conducted a Sunday-school. Sometimes we took the organ with us in the wagon and brought it back the same day. Whenever it happened to be there during week days we used it in training the pupils to sing some of the best hymns and patriotic songs. The Ruthenian children especially were very fond of singing and looked forward eagerly to these impromptu sing songs. During the last year or two in the district I had the privilege of borrowing a Victrola once every two weeks. Both classical and popular records were used to show them the difference between the two classes of music.

Caruso, McCormack, Melba, Alma Gluck, Mischel Elman, and also a number of the best Symphony Orchestral numbers seemed to be their favorites. One wee lad never seemed to get much above the "Irish Washerwoman" and "Pop-Goes-the-Weasel" stage, and utterly failed to appreciate any of the finer numbers. All of which goes to show that it takes ~~all~~ sorts of people to build up a community.

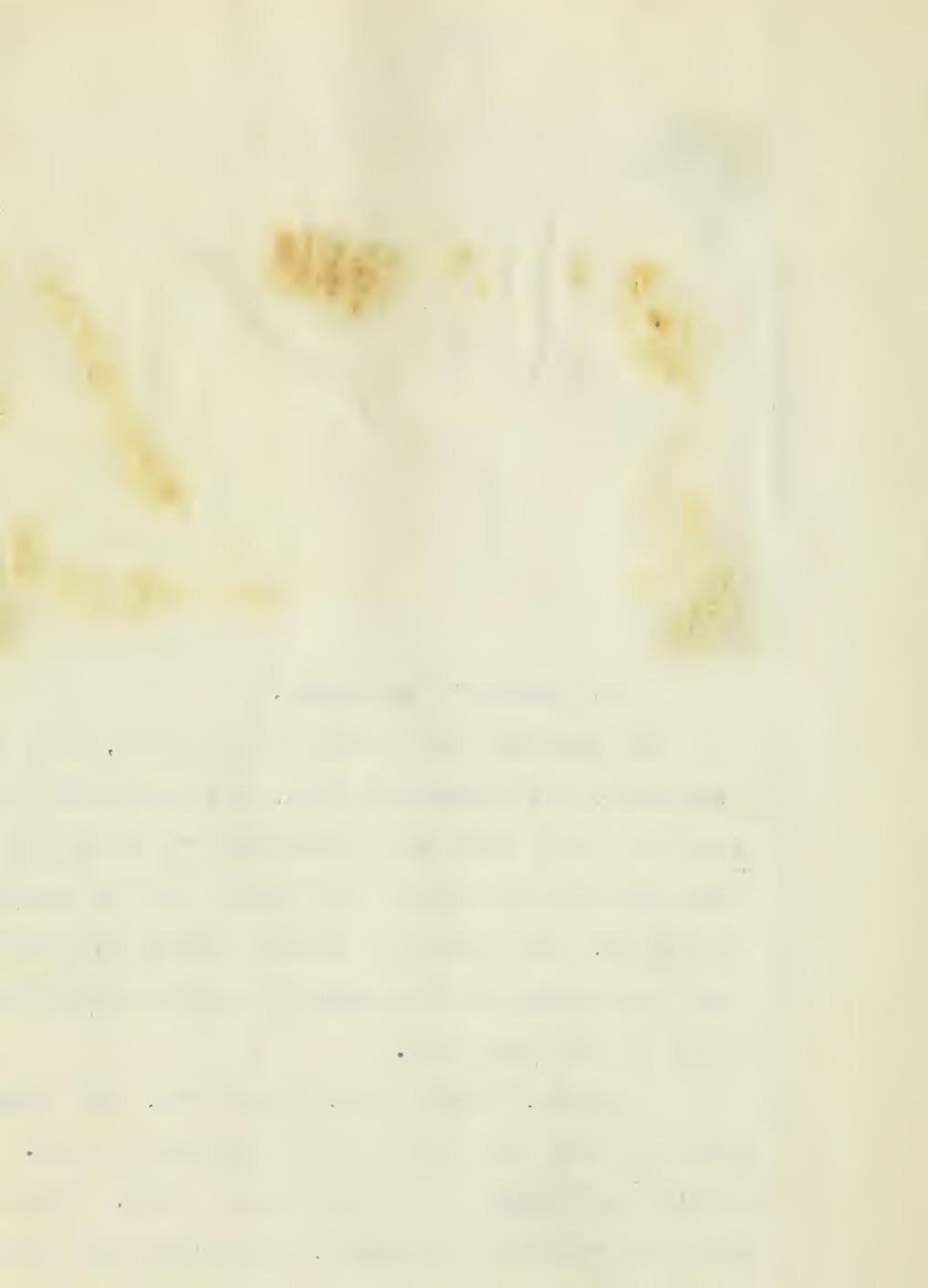
Our home during our stay at Angle Lake consisted of a 12' X 14' tent over a framework of lumber. A board floor and a six-foot wall, four feet of which was lumber, made a very comfortable camping spot in the secretary's poplar grove. A little lean-to kitchen on the east end of the main tent completed this tent-house. Our cellar was under the floor and even in the coldest part of winter vegetables were quite safe, as we had two stoves constantly in action above the kitchen and living-room. It was necessary to bank up our house with plenty of sawdust for the winter months. A number of bird-houses put up in different parts of the grove encourages our feathered friends to spend the summers with us.



X. Teacher's Residence.

Our camp was very close to the store, post office, telephone, and blacksmith shop, and we decided that it would be doing something worthwhile to operate a small experimental station for the benefit of the people around us. The Secretary agreed with my proposal and gave me the use of two acres of land reaching from our grove to the main road.

Alfalfa, fodder corn, winter rye, and brome grass had not been grown in the district at all. Alfalfa was seeded in six different plots. In one plot the rows were 24" apart, in another plot they were 36" apart, and in another the seed was broadcasted.

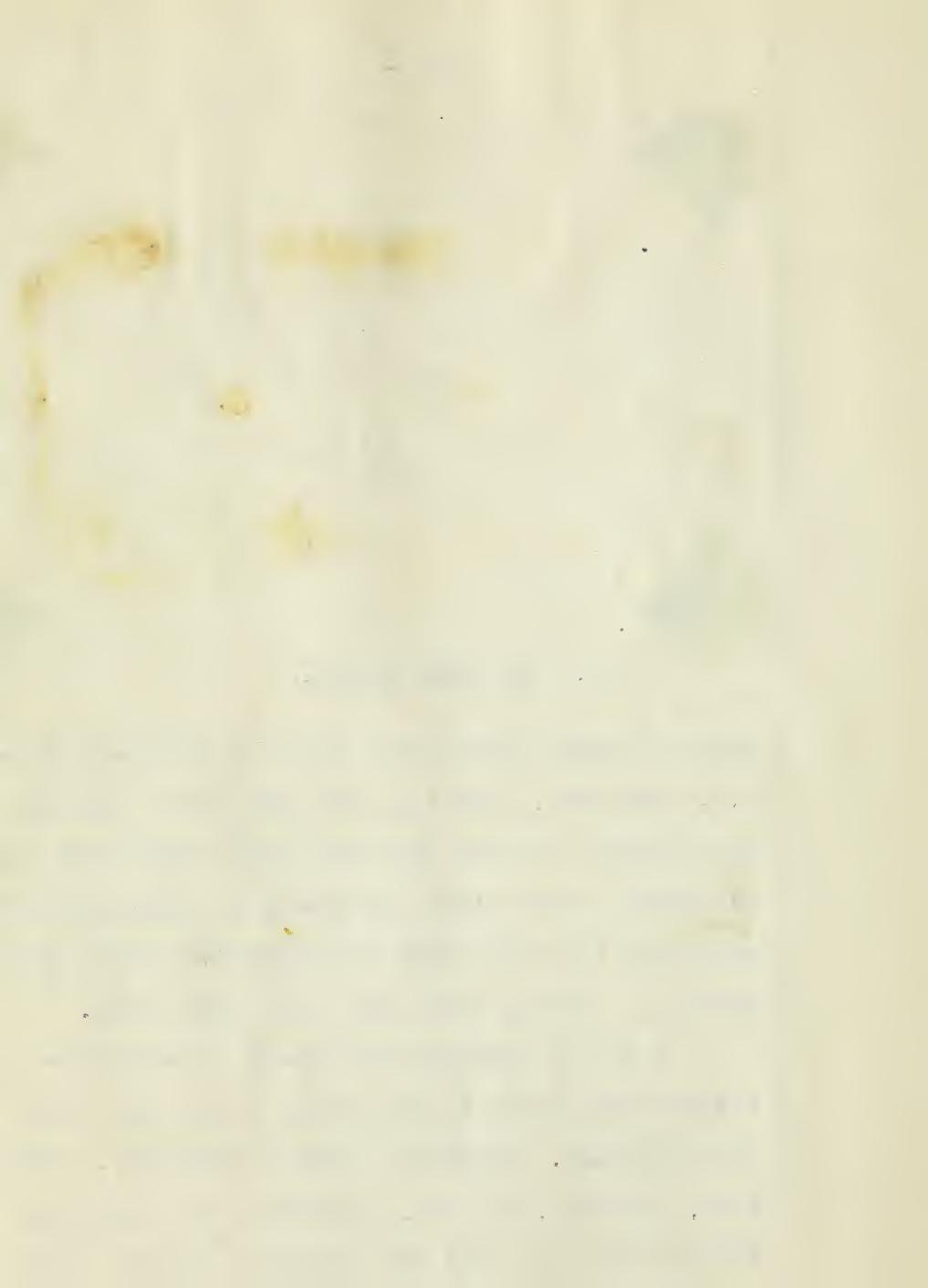




XI. The Camp Garden.

Then we seeded three other plots on different dates, i.e. June 15th, July 1st, and July 15th. Similar work was carried out with the other crops mentioned, and customers at the store had plenty of opportunity to watch the crops and judge for themselves which date and method of seeding would best suit their farm.

A fairly complete assortment of vegetables and flowers were grown to advantage in the upper part of the garden. Different kinds of potatoes, table corn, tomatoes, marrows, cucumbers, and pumpkins, demonstrated the fact that Northern Alberta could produce a very commendable variety if only given the



opportunity. The floral end of the garden was not neglected by any means. We used a hotbed and a cold-frame to supply not only the plants for our "Camp Garden" and the "School Garden" but also for any in the district who wanted to plant some. Besides the



XII. Flowers, Vines and Arches.

well-known perennial flowers, we introduced a great many annual flowers that had not as yet been grown in the district. Plants from the hotbed were given to any boy or girl who did any particularly good pieee of school work. This gave them a start, and naturally stimulated them to produce a greater variety of things

in their own gardens at home. So many of the vegetables and flowers that we grew successfully had never been grown because someone, who was given credit for knowing, had simply stated that they would not grow so far north and that had settled it. Our practical demonstration corrected a great many of these careless statements.

Real-estate men who had land to sell in the district soon realized that it was to their interest to first show their prospective buyers through our gardens and after showing them what the Angle Lake country could produce, they found little difficulty in making their sales. Commercial travellers, visitors, and government officials carried away new impressions from the district's gardens.

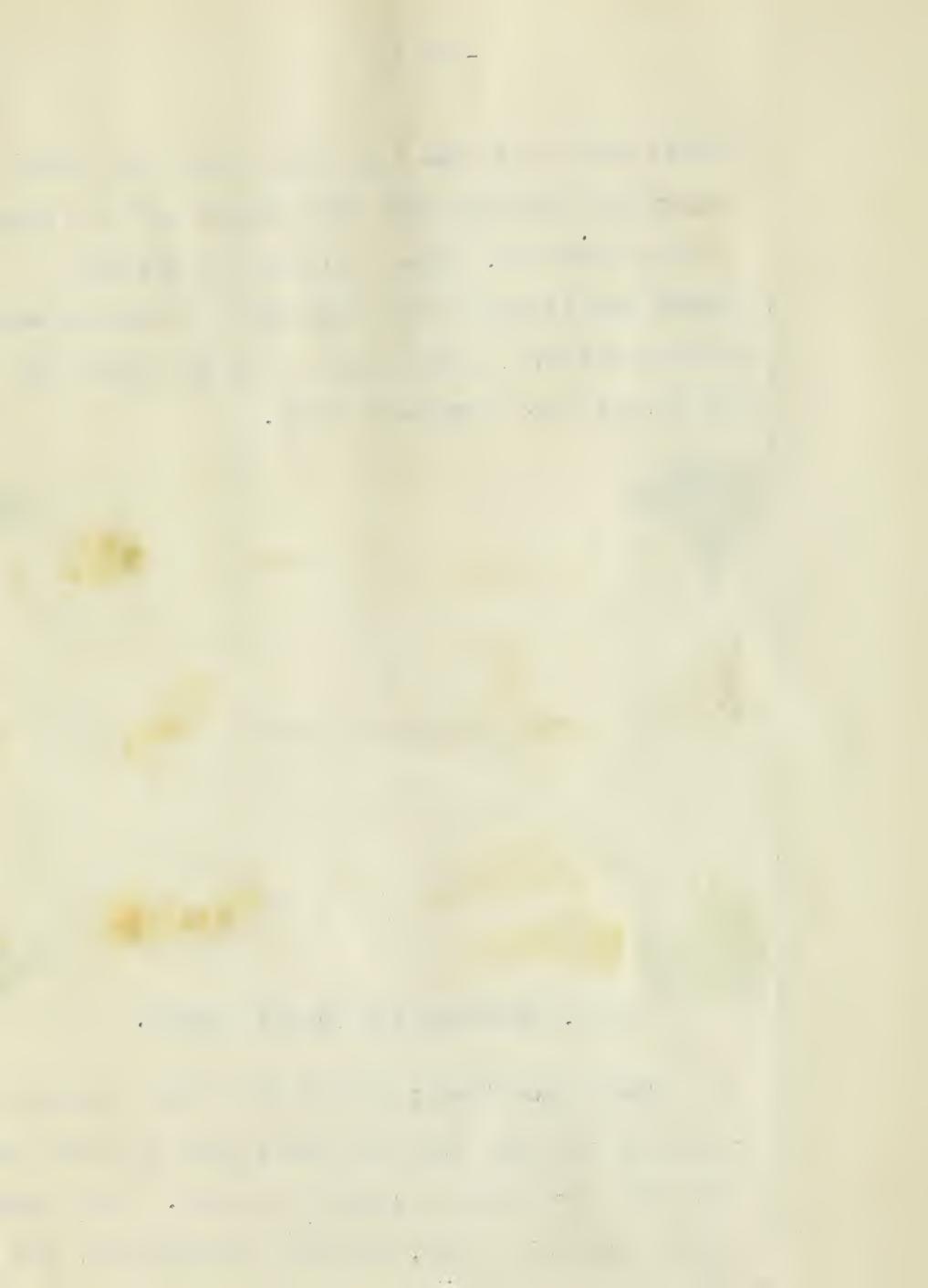
The school garden proved a strong link between the people of the district and the school. Plots were planted with all the standard varieties of cereal crops, grasses and pasture or forage crops grown in Western Canada. Many of these were known to these people, but there were some that they had never seen. Then there was the added advantage of seeing them growing side by side on the same soil under almost identical growing conditions. Such crops as

Alaska wheat and some very early oats were grown simply as a warning that they should not be attempted in that district. Some districts in Western Canada had already been exploited by ruthless seedmen selling farmers a great deal of Alaska wheat for seed, one of our most worthless sorts.



XIII. Planting the School Garden.

These experiments attracted a large number of visitors not only from the Angle Lake district but from the surrounding country as well. They compared their crops with ours, obtained information, and gradually began to look upon the school garden and our

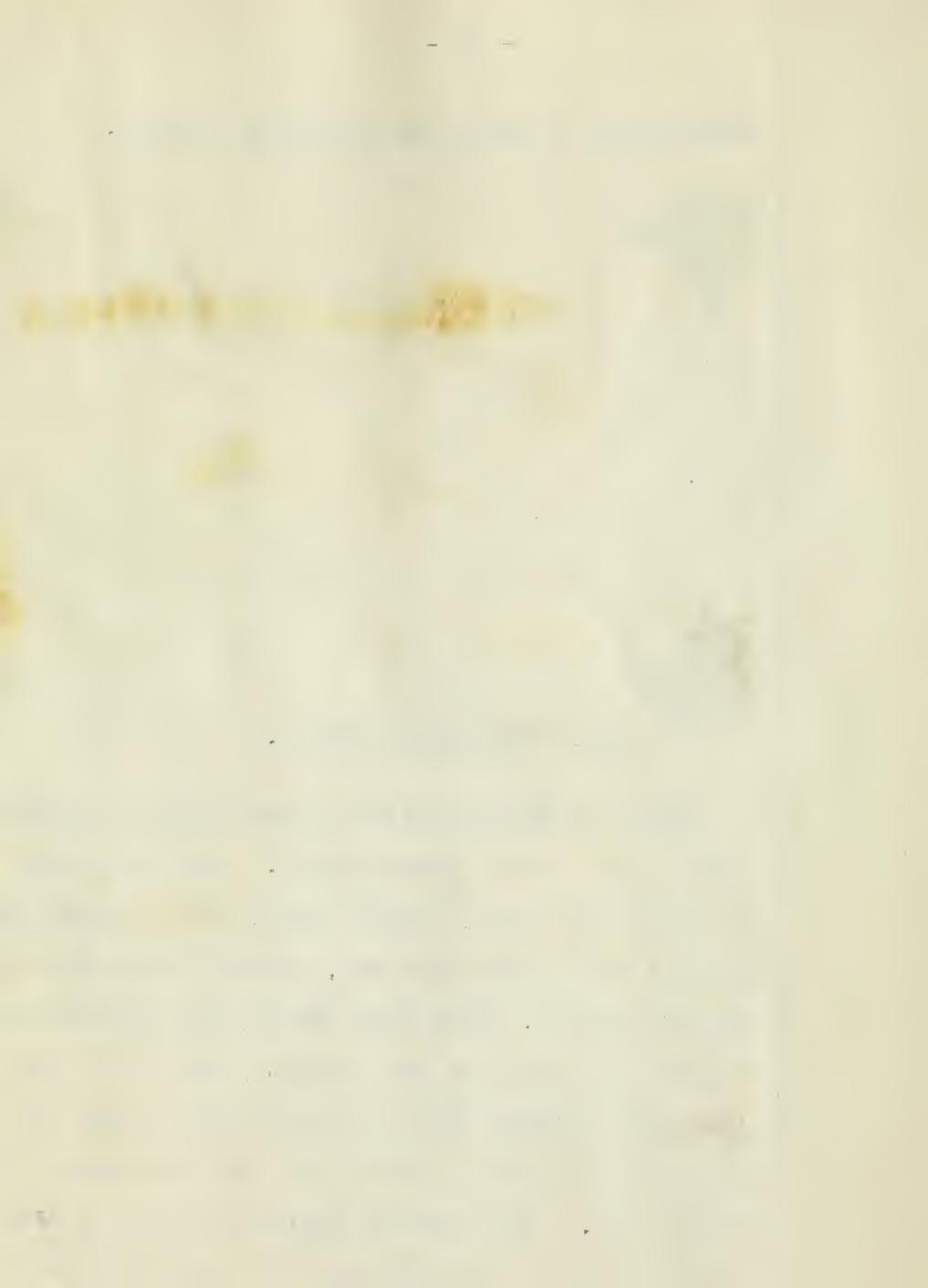


camp garden as their demonstration centres.



XIV. The School Garden.

Early in May we seeded a few ounces of caragana seed in one of the school plots. The following spring we set out a double hedge, with caragana seedlings a foot apart each way, around three sides of the school grounds. They were immediately trimmed back to within two inches of the ground. The second year they were trimmed back to within three inches of the ground and to within four inches in the spring of the third year. This severe trimming gave us a caragana hedge that was very bushy and so think that an ordinary



cat has now considerable difficulty in getting through it.

The children in the lower grades gathered the seed pods and shelled them during their "busy-work" periods in school. The seeds were used to advantage in number work, nature study, and oral composition, and then divided in equal piles, one pile for each family in the district. So that now caragana trees and hedges are quite common in the Angle Lake community, and they all came from the few ounces sown in the school garden.



XV. The School Garden and the New Canadian Gardeners.

One section of the school garden was devoted to

flowers and shrubs, both annual and perennial. Rustic arches and seats were made of willow. Hops, wild cucumber and canary vine were trained over the arches. These arches were copied at many of the homes by the pupils, and a few seeds supplied at the school gave an improved effect around their home gardens.

Various root crops such as sugar beets, mangels, and turnips were grown in other plots. These were either sold or given away to some one in the district to test out their suitability as feed for hogs or cattle.

Herbert and Sunbeam raspberries were set out in two plots and Senator Dunlap strawberries in another plot. In the first place our idea was to show that these small fruits would do well if given reasonable care, and secondly, as soon as possible, we wanted to distribute plants from these fruit plots to interested people in the district. This experiment proved an unqualified success, and many of the people pick as much fruit now from their own little garden patch as they used to from the nearby section of land.

In order to interest the children in the school garden proposition, we put aside all money secured from the sale of garden products for our athletic fund.

When they realized that a well-managed school garden meant more money in our treasury and that in turn made possible the purchase of more playground equipment, they went at the job with a will to conquer and with plenty of enthusiasm. The school board supplied us with a few rakes and hoes. The children brought their own, and we borrowed axes, shovels and other things as we needed them. After the seeding was done in the spring, a half-day twice a month kept the soil well cultivated and the garden absolutely free of weeds. By June 30th we had removed the weed menace altogether.



XVI. Agricultural Exhibits from the
School Garden.

As soon as the green peas and corn were ready we marketed them in Vermilion at eight cents per pound and seventy-five cents per dozen respectively. New potatoes sold at five cents per pound, and other vegetables brought proportionate prices. Caragana seedlings and strawberry runners were sold to people outside of our district. Each of the cereal and grass crops were harvested as they reached maturity. Each pupil in the school had to keep a record of some particular crop, starting at the time of planting until maturity. Measurements were taken weekly and some very interesting results were noted in comparing the different rates of growth.

The pupils of Grades VI, VII, and VIII, working under my direction, made neat exhibition sheaves of the cereals, grasses, and forage crops. Some very pretty combinations of corn cobs were made by the same grades. All of these were arranged on our school walls and gave it a very agricultural appearance. Names of all varieties were printed on cards by the pupils and each sheaf given its proper label. When the parents attended church, U.F.A. meetings, or social evenings at the school they used to study these names and the distinguishing features of each



XVII. Agricultural Exhibits.

variety. If there were any samples over after our sheaves were completed they were divided among the ratepayers. Many of them are now producing better wheat, oats and barley from the seed distributed by this means.



All this effort in connection with athletic apparatus and the school garden began to make the school a very attractive centre in which to hold all community meetings. The U.F.A. local held monthly meetings. All Livestock Association and political meetings also came to the school. With plenty of opportunity to play games there was naturally no place quite like the school for social evenings. There was scarcely a week that we did not meet at least twice at the school. A program of sports or games was always the first item to be disposed off and when it was too dark to continue, the business part of the meeting followed.

A new furnace had been installed in the basement. The old box stove was now relegated to a basement corner where it was used to make tea or coffee. A serving table and cupboard for the cups and saucers was added to this equipment. As there were four or five dozen cups at the school all the time, we introduced the "family cup" system for the school children. A card on which the name of a family was printed was tacked on the wall immediately above a cup hook on which the family cup hung. All members of that family used that cup and no other. They liked this

method very much as it pleased their idea of independence and also acted to a certain extent to prevent the spread of disease. The girls washed these fifteen family cups every week.

A new cement floor had been put in the basement. Seats were made so that it could be used as a lunch room and play-room on cold or rainy days. During the winter months oyster suppers, chicken dinners, and dance breakfasts were served in the basement without disturbing the dancing, entertainment or business meeting being carried on upstairs. Cards could be played on the basement tables when they were free. A large crowd could be comfortably handled at the school. There was even a place in the basement where babies could be "parked" where they could sleep while their elders danced.

Our U.F.A. local planned to have other locals ten and fifteen miles east of us, visit our school twice during the summer. Then the Angle Lake people returned these visits and were entertained by the other locals. New life entered the locals from this interchange of visits, ideas and practices. It helped to extend the community idea over a much greater area, and this should be the ultimate objective of any community endeavor.

One of the drawing cards of these inter-local visits was our "Jazz piano". We had a regular orchestra consisting of piano, violin, flute and banjo, but had nothing to take the part of the drummer's traps. So the pupils and I built a wooden frame that could stand alone and was movable. Then we spent a few evenings after school hunting up Jazz material around the houses and barns of the district.

A family wash-tub with a cowhide stretched lightly over it acted as our bass drum. The stand also carried a circular saw, horseshoes, bottles filled to different levels with water to produce definite notes, sheep bells, school bells



XIX. The Jazz Piano.

sleigh bells, bicycle bells, garden rake, spade and hoe, burrs from a grain crusher, discs from a discharrow, loose hardwood blocks, dust pan, rah-rah, and a few more things too numerous to mention.

Five of the pupils kept excellent time on this apparatus, two of them taking the leading beats in the measure and the other three bringing in the aftertime. By keeping the quintette properly subdued in their accompaniment they formed a very effective background for the regular orchestra. The parents were very proud to see their children taking the parts so well. Six encores were quite usual for a number played by this composition. Many came twenty miles to see and hear for themselves what it was like. Even scrap piles took on a hitherto unknown value.

A window-trimming competition was put on for the larger girls. Each girl was assigned a particular window, shelf or part of the table or library where she was to keep bouquets of flowers throughout the summer. Both wild flowers and garden flowers were used and some of the girls proved to be artists in arranging very effective collections of flowers and grasses. A prize was given each fall to the girl who had given the

the most faithful as well as the most artistic service during the summer. The girl's name appeared on a card above the section she was responsible for, and the fact that the grown-ups of the district often met at the school fostered a keen rivalry among the girls.

There was another advantage in having all meetings held at the school. The ladies of the sewing circle quietly set to work to provide our windows with both blinds and curtains. These with a few more good pictures, our agricultural exhibits and our nature study museum made the school-room much more homelike and vastly more interesting to both parents and pupils.



XX. The Angle Lake Sewing Circle.

Our museum contained hornet nests, birds' nests, beaver stumps, a buffalo head, some fossils and a few Indian arrow heads and spear-points. A bird-house competition brought out some very original results from the boys and girls. These were arranged where they would show up most effectively in the school and also serve as models for later builders.

Every time the people of the district met in the school they found something new in the decoration of our walls or some added attraction on the school grounds. This retained their whole-hearted support in any new venture we undertook and also brought larger crowds from outside districts to see our school and compare it with their own.

The gopher pest was becoming a real problem. Gopher poison was purchased through the municipality, and a community bee organized to poison all parts of the district on the same day in early spring. By setting the date about a week before the young gophers were born and while the prospective mothers were very hungry we secured very good results. Then a follow-up method was organized at the school. The school board was prevailed upon to give five dollars to be used in buying prizes for the boys and

girls bringing the greatest number of gopher tails to school during the spring and summer season. Most of the poisoned gophers had been either eaten or dragged underground by this time. The boys and girls brought their gopher tails to school every Friday morning. I counted them and credited each pupil with the amount brought in. The counting was far from pleasant during the hot summer months, and I insisted that they market their catch while it was fresh. When the count was completed the tails were burned in the furnace to prevent a weekly re-appearance all summer. First, second and third prizes were given to both boys and girls. The school board gave ten dollars the second year, and for their outlay of fifteen dollars the school children accounted for over five thousand gophers during two years. Thus it cost the school board three-tenths of a cent for each gopher killed. This follow-up method together with the community bee in the spring may seem but a drop in the bucket when you compare the gophers killed in that district with the gophers in Alberta, but if each district did as much effective work the gopher menace would be kept down.

Another section of our school wall was reserved for the noxious weeds of the district. The pupils and parents brought the worst weeds to the school where they were identified and mounted. They were then placed with the others on the wall with a short description and means of eradication printed on the mount. A good collection of bulletins dealing with all phases of agriculture were arranged on three shelves at the front of the school. The parents were at liberty to borrow any bulletin of interest to them, take it home, read it and then return it. This, I am convinced, is a better method than handing out bulletins on a wholesale basis and often to people who never look at them. On the other hand, if they find one



XXI. The Angle Lake School Children, and Noxious Weed Collection on the Wall to the right of the window.

bulletin of interest and a real help to them they will soon come back for more.

Our school library had now grown until it contained over two hundred books. These were chosen to suit both children and adults. A definite loan system was organized with a nominal fine imposed upon anyone who did not return the book on time. The "fines" were used in sending for illustrated booklets and maps published by the larger railway and steamship companies of Canada and the United States. These often contained a splendid set of pictures dealing with some particular country and were used in the geography classes. The smaller boys and girls, as soon as their regular assignment was completed satisfactorily, used to get some of these picture books and incidentally learned some geography.

An attendance chart encouraged regular attendance at the school. The names of all the boys and girls who had one hundred percent attendance for the past month were written in colors on this small piece of blackboard which was fastened to the front wall of the school. This automatically removed many of the usual excuses and the parents, too, became anxious to see the names of their children appear on this board,

especially when the school had now become a regular meeting place. During my last term in that district, the school attendance was over ninety percent for the term. Out of a total of forty-three pupils enrolled during the month of July, nine had one hundred percent attendance, thirteen missed but one day and twelve only missed two days.

Another feature that proved very attractive on Friday afternoons during the hot weather was our ice-cream booth in the grove. We built a table and rustic seats under the trees near our merry-go-round where three freezers full of ice-cream used to disappear as if by magic. Each family contributed its assigned share of the ingredients on Friday morning. It was made in the basement during the noon hour and served after the regular hour of games on Friday afternoon. Two or three of the mothers of the district who had a standing reputation for good cake and cookies were invited to school and were of course asked to bring some of the results of their culinary art with them. Friends passing along the road, or men working on the roads or in nearby fields were called in to share our sylvan treat. It was almost uncanny to notice how much road-work was done on the roads

near the school from that time on. Potato patches seemed to grow better too if they could be located within sight of the school.



XXII. Ice Cream.

This proved a real treat to our New Canadians who seldom saw icecream. Another splendid opportunity was given here to stress the "Ladies First" rule. The Ruthenian boys and some of the English-speaking boys as well, at first thought only of themselves and rushed to the slaughter. It was rather hard on these hungry spirits for a time to have to sit down and watch the girls being waited on first, but in time they realized the justice of it all. The icecream

feature was just another of the many ways we were using to encourage attendance at school and to bind the home and school together. We used to sing some of the pupils' favorites while we were out there in the grove, and one little Irishman put the idea of home and school union very aptly. As usual one Friday I asked them what they wanted to sing. This little son of the Emerald Isle, having just consumed four big dishes of ice/cream and as many pieces of cake held up his hand and said "Please Sir, let us sing "Blest Be The Tie that Binds".

Games like football, basketball and baseball were well established by this time so we naturally began to look for others that could be played on the school grounds. A baseball diamond for the girls filled a very important place in our playground equipment. There were now enough boys and girls to carry on most of their games separately. The smaller girls especially enjoyed having their own diamond. Sometimes we matched the girls' team against a team of the smaller boys on this diamond on Friday afternoons, and later played a game of baseball between two teams of the larger boys on their own diamond.

Volley ball was also introduced about this time,

and proved very popular with both the school children and the adults. From then on we met at the school grounds twice a week to play games. Others who still



XXIII. Volley Ball and The Girls' Baseball Diamond.

preferred baseball or basketball always had the opportunity to play them instead. This was but another link in the chain that was slowly but surely being forged to unite home and school. No opposition was offered to the installation of new playground equipment at the school as they began to realize that the school was the logical centre, the one place where personal jealousies, and differences in politics and religion did not enter.

The adults of the district were very fond of playing the game known locally as horseshoes. We made two pitches on the grounds - one for the girls and one for the boys, and collected a set of horseshoes for each pitch. Another swing in the grove on the girls' side removed many little disputes as both boys and girls had now one of their own.

During the summer months the pupils ate their lunches under the shade of the grove. The girls had built a rustic bowery over which they trained vines. Seats were built to accommodate all the girls. The boys immediately constructed some seats in their part of the grove and took special pains to keep their lunch places neat and clean.

Possibly the most popular game of all was initiated at the school during our last summer in the district. Tennis had been left last on the list because of the expense in buying a net, tapes, racquets, balls and suitable shoes. The board showed its good will by donating fifteen dollars to the tennis proposition. Each man in the district paid one dollar for the privilege of playing.

Another "bee" brought the men of the district out after supper one night to make the court. A plow,

scrapers, wagons, shovels and plenty of muscle and enthusiasm soon did the rougher part of the work. All the sod and loose earth was hauled away to fill up the old well and also a little hollow at the back of the school grounds. During the next few days the pupils and I worked during recesses, noon hours, and after school to level the court, carry away all loose earth, put in the posts and lay the tapes.



XXIV. Tennis Court.

At first we had to be content with second hand racquets. The larger boys and girls soon learned to play the game. This left more room on the baseball diamonds, and the basketball and volley ball courts

for the other children. By September a tournament was a decided success at the school and later inter-school tournaments were staged between the Angle Lake school and other schools to the east.

At first the adults of the district were content to play volley ball and tennis three times a week. In a very short time tennis had taken such a hold on them that we had to arrange for four nights a week and finally for six nights. One old bachelor whom we had never been able to reach by any of the other games or even by social evenings, became one of the most enthusiastic supporters of the new game. In fact our greatest difficulty was to get him to sit down and give some of the others a chance. A long rustic seat was built for those who were waiting their turn at the game. It was so situated that they could watch all four players in action and greatly improve their own game by mentally taking notes of the good strokes and mistakes of others.

As an aftermath of this slight introduction of tennis, there are now eight tennis courts in operation in the Angle Lake district besides a great many more in the eastern districts. In order to

keep them in practice even during the winter we introduced "Ping-pong" or "Table Tennis" and this game has now just as firm a hold as tennis had.

In country districts there are two standard types of entertainment - dancing and card playing. In the Angle Lake district there has been a decided preference shown for both summer and winter sports over dancing and card playing. People have found that they are not a minute older than they think they are and by taking part in outdoor games the infirmities of old age are kept away.

Winter sports included skating and hockey on Angle Lake. A large slab pile supplied us with plenty of material for shelters, seats and fuel for our bonfires. Birch Hill, situated half a mile north of the school gave us an excellent location for a toboggan slide and ski run.

After all these winter sports we contrived to have ~~the~~ young people come back to the school where hot coffee and light refreshments could easily be served. The ratepayers began to realize that a school building and grounds could be put to a variety of uses and thus give better value for the tax money annually put

into it. Care had to be taken on all occasions that no damage resulted to school property and to leave everything we used, in just as good condition as that in which we found it.



XXV. Toboggan Slide on Birch Hill

When we first went to Angle Lake not one of the boys or girls could swim. There was a nice lake with a sandy bottom about a mile from the school. We borrowed the secretary's team one night after school and hauled two loads of slabs from the old sawmill down to the lake. Each family had brought a few rusty nails and spikes. We soon constructed

two dressing rooms provided with seats and places to hand up clothing. These dressing rooms were in the grove along the shore and about forty rods apart.



XXVI. The First Class in Swimming.

A fine sandy beach between the grove and the water gave the place an ideal setting for a swimming hole. We hauled two loads of dry logs from a nearby grove, where the older boys and I had cut them the night before. We made two rafts - one that was staked in eight feet of water for the adults, and another that was left floating nearer the shore for the beginners.

During the first year bathing suits consisted chiefly of old overhauls and dresses, pinned or tied to suit the purpose. Later Timothy Eaton did a flourishing business in supplying our bathers with real swimming suits and even caps.

We devoted part of our physical training period to bringing back to life supposed victims of drowning. This practice was kept up throughout each swimming season and helped to impress upon them the fact that it was a dangerous sport for careless people. Fortunately we never needed to put our training into practice. Only on two occasions did two of them



XXVII. The Joys of Swimming.

swim beyond their depth and get into difficulty. However, in both cases I was able to get them to shore before anything serious happened. These cases also acted as warnings to others. Our weekly practice on "victims" coupled with warnings and their own common sense kept them from taking unnecessary risks. Our good fortune and careful supervision was all the more appreciated when it was considered later that we always had our forty regulars and very often a dozen or so of the adults as well.

Stakes were placed at measured intervals in five feet of water along the shore. Every boy and girl present was being taught how to swim, dive and float. Every two weeks all were given a test along this measured course, and the records were posted in the school. During the first two years over half of the boys and girls learned to swim, dive and float. One boy swam thirty-four rods, and our best girl swimmer made eighteen rods.

Many of the bigger brothers and sisters and even the parents became interested in the two real good swims we were having every week. They began to come down to the lake too, and this also worked to our advantage because they generally came down with a team

and wagon or with the car. This gave us transportation both ways



XXVIII. A Young Paddler.

From a school swimming hole this pretty little spot gradually developed into a community picnic grounds. A volley ball court and places where the men could play horseshoes were established. Later on a baseball diamond was made and swings and lunch tables were put up in the grove. Boats were hauled there from some of the neighbors' places just for the picnic day.



XXIX. Community Picnic Grounds.

The swimming hole was one part of the community life that we could not move to the school so we did our best to develop it where we found it. It is a remarkable feature of many rural districts where the lake, stream or dam exists, that so many people fail to appreciate their opportunities, for such a splendid form of recreation as swimming affords. Where the facilities do not actually exist some well-organized community effort might well be directed towards damming some small stream. Teachers and others with the natural ability to lead the way, may bring a great

deal of real pleasure to many of our Alberta girls and boys by introducing swimming.

In these different ways, after seven years spent in the Angle Lake district, my wife and I feel that we have at least accomplished something to make life for those people and their children somewhat more complete. The hard uncertain work of farming was brightened here and there by the outings we had together and to which we can always look back with a great deal of pleasure. Not for a moment do we assume that all credit was due to us alone for the success of this undertaking. Without very careful handling, at times, of the relations between the school board and the young people of the district, the co-operation of many progressive citizens would have been lost. The fact that the district was but sparsely populated and tax collections difficult to make, rendered the situation rather a problem during the first few years. A few poor crops and low prices for most farm products did not help matters at all.



XXX. School Sports and Visitors.

In spite of these more or less local conditions we always felt that we had the board's support in everything we undertook. They fully realized what it meant not only for their children but for the district as well, if their school and grounds could be so managed as to stand head and shoulders over other schools in the district. They did not take for granted that all we did outside of school hours in developing that community playground was part of a rural teacher's work. They showed this in many ways by gifts and by lowered prices on articles we bought

from them. They did everything in their power to make our stay with them as pleasant and as comfortable as it was possible to make it. Last but not least,



XXXI. The Angle Lake School Children.

my salary had practically doubled at the end of the seventh term, which is fairly definite evidence that they realized what kind of service they were getting and were willing to pay for it.

You have followed the story of seven year's work in a pioneer district. You may, after all, be inclined to think that we did not accomplish very much in that length of time. That, I consider to be the keynote

of our success. From the first we avoided launching out on an elaborate program and thereby ruining our credit with the board by asking too much at once. Instead, we proceeded slowly and cautiously, asking and receiving a little more financial aid from the board as the years added more to our project. We adopted their games when we began our work rather than introducing point blank the games that appealed more to us. Then quietly but surely we introduced a new game or so each year. A married man, and especially one whose



XXXII. Boys' Baseball Diamond.

wife is willing to get out, mix with the people and take charge of or assist in organizing games for the

gentler sex, has an added advantage in a position of this sort. To avoid being constantly in the lime-light we started early to develop such men and women or boys and girls who showed they possessed both the ability and qualities of natural leaders. These people were held responsible for certain sections of our community enterprise and this gave more time to study and correct any weaknesses that appeared in our organization from time to time. These local leaders



XXXIII. The Angle Lake School.

assumed their responsibilities in the right spirit and were then in a position to carry on the system when we eventually left the district.

Subsequent reading of the work of outstanding educational reformers afforded a number of very pleasant surprises. Unconsciously, we had followed out Locke's plan of considering what his pupils would do and be rather than what they would know. Boys and girls were shown the value of good manners and courtesy at every opportunity, so that when they finally took their places either in country or town life many of the rough corners were worn smooth. Rousseau advocated the principle of the teacher keeping to the background but yet having full control of the work in hand. We contrived as far as possible to avoid the limelight in order to better direct the development of habits of self-teaching in our pupils, and to encourage and direct the efforts of pupils possessing natural qualifications for leadership. Again, Pestalozzi's school for the rural children at Neuhof and later at Stanz made very interesting reading in the light of our own experiences at Angle Lake. The work in the school room was closely correlated with all we did in our school garden, our games or our trips to other districts. These sources gave us an abundant supply of practical material that the pupils understood and

therefore could set to work on at once. For example, problems in arithmetic, essays in composition, either oral or written, or studies in natural science, were made much more simple by using local material. Our "laboratory" was a large one and always convenient to the school.

Froebel's study of children showed him that one of their most striking characteristics was restlessness. The children of the Angle Lake school could not be considered an exception to this rule. We attempted to overcome this restlessness by so planning our time-table so that it included sufficient manual training, physical training and games and gardening or any seasonal outdoor work to form a natural safety valve for this excess energy or restlessness. Both the necessary restraint and the opportunities offered in our community proved beneficial to their moral nature and helped as a cure for selfishness. They were being trained in the idea that team work would be just as essential to a successful life later on as it was then in some of the games or school work. John Dewey has often referred to the value of encouraging teamwork in the child's school life in order to better train it for its place as a citizen of the future.

It afforded us a quiet but satisfying pleasure to find that unknowingly we had been undergoing some of the same experiences, and trying to solve local difficulties in very much the same way though to a much more limited extent, as the men famous in educational reform of both Europe and America.

In conclusion, I shall give a brief summary of some of the chief principles to keep in mind in order to give the greatest service to the rural school:-

1. Careful and constant supervision by the teacher, is essential over all games played at the school to encourage honesty and discourage selfishness.

2. The larger pupils must be held responsible for the care of all athletic equipment. The school's motto should be "A place for everything and everything in its place."

3. Play the games with the pupils whenever possible and see that every player plays the game for the sake of the fun and exercise there is in it. There is no place in this system for the type of teacher who chases the pupils out of the school at recesses and noon hours in order to have perfect quiet while reading some good novel while the boys and girls play or fight it out unmolested in their own way.

4. The teacher must visit every family in the district in order to do efficient work with all the pupils. Interest the parents and adults in some particular phase of the work being carried on at school. One visit from them will make it easier to get them back again.

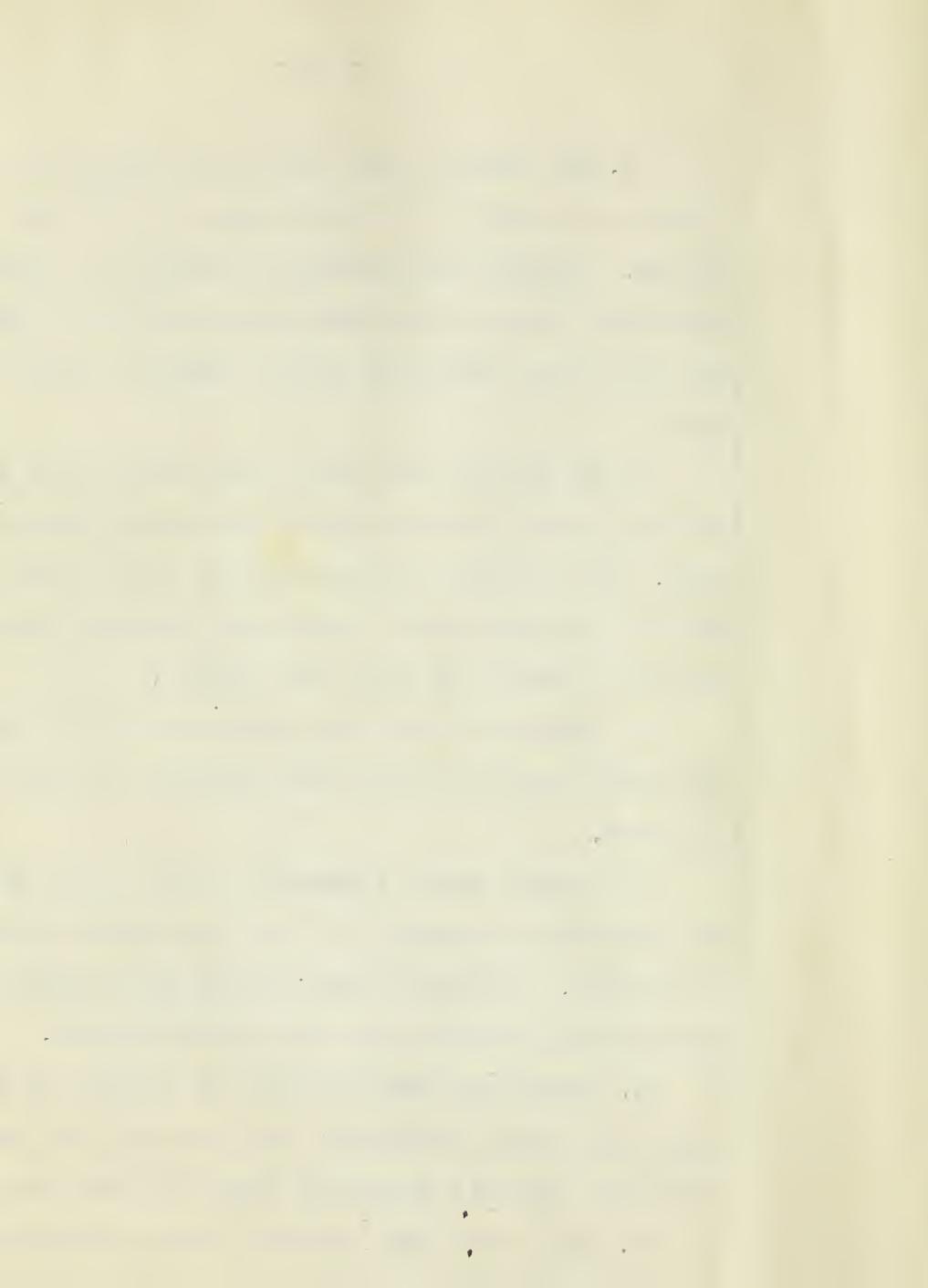
5. The people and local conditions of any district must be closely studied before very much planning can be done. It is better to accomplish a little each year rather than ruin all by making any elaborate plans and failing to carry out what was started.

6. Develop the natural resources of the district and school ground to the best advantage of the school children.

7. A great deal of physical labor on the part of the teacher is essential to get the athletic equipment into place. Other willing workers will follow any hard-working teacher who sets a good example.

8. Gratuitous work done by the teacher at different times and places throughout the locality will make it easier to organize community "bees" at the school.

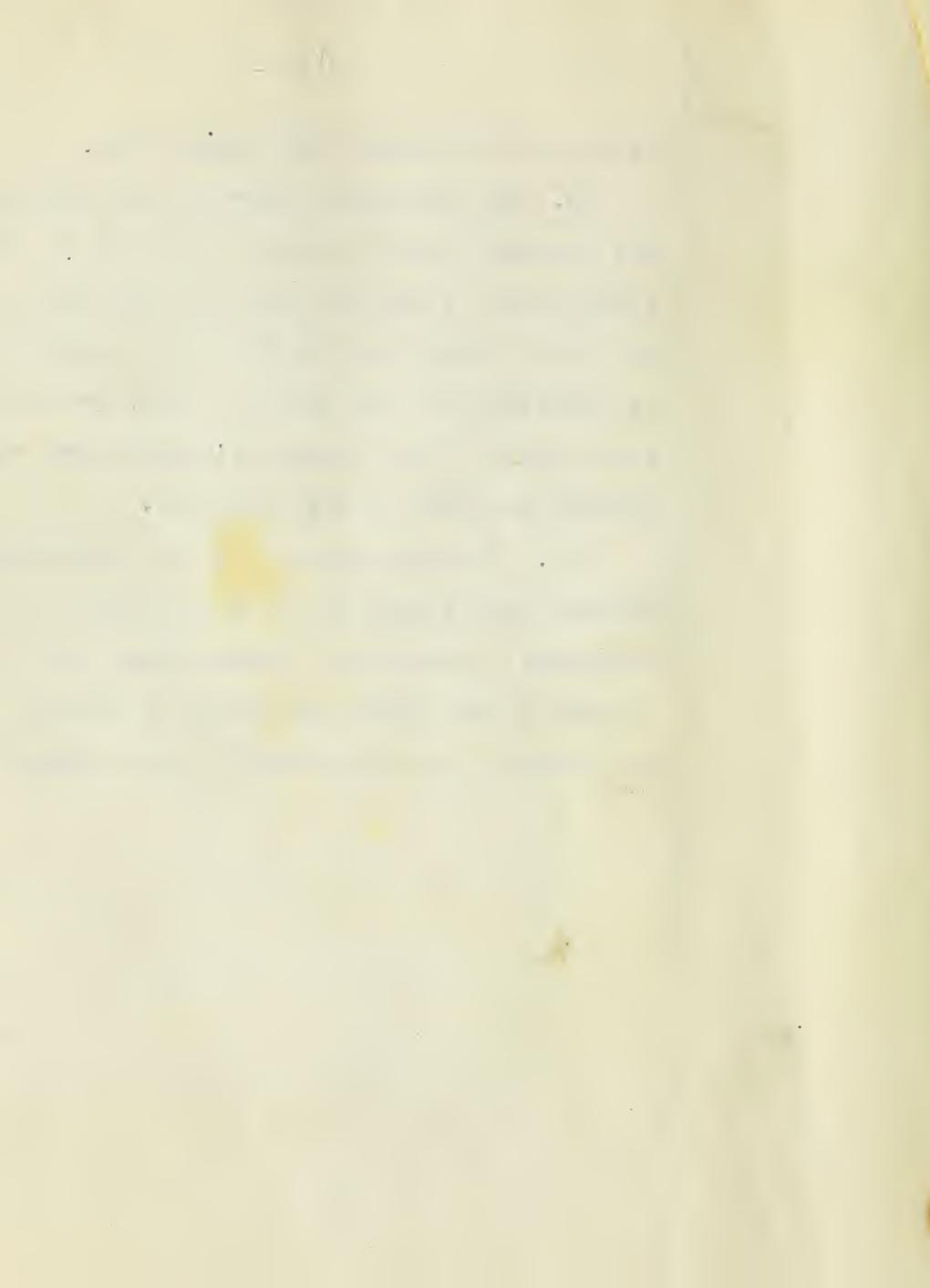
9. Remain strictly neutral in all local difficulties between neighbors. Listen courteously to their tales

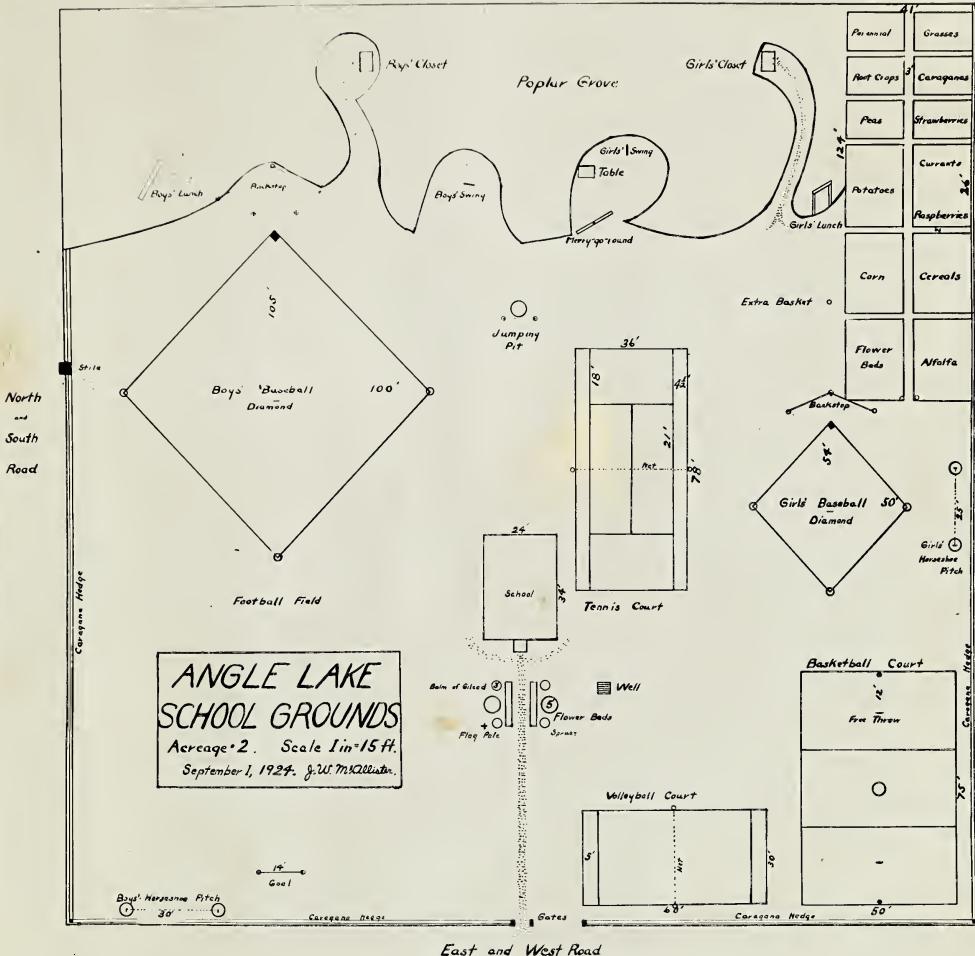


of woe and then instantly forget them.

10. No two school districts are exactly alike, and the teacher's first problem is to try to solve local conditions. I mention this for fear some teacher might be led to think that all the above suggestions might be applicable in one school. Time, patience and a very close study of the community's needs are essential in finding out what is most suitable.

11. In conclusion, it is very important that the teacher should make use of every ounce of tact, diplomacy, training and common sense, and be prepared to make a great many sacrifices in making, slowly but surely, the rural school a real community centre.





XXXIV. Chart of the Angle Lake School Grounds.



McAllister, J.W.

M. Sc. in Ag., 1925

